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AUTHOR Butts, David P.
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the nature and usefulness of performance objectives, and asserts that they can be springboards or coffin lids depending upon the intent of the user. Performance objectives facilitate: (1) directions for the learning context, (2) selecting learning opportunities, (3) fitting the learning context to the learner, and (4) assessing success. They force the teacher to be clearer and more specific in intentional outcomes which result in the teacher having a greater insight into the total tasks, and they help both the teacher and student to spot trivia in the learning context. Performance objectives provide clear goals and help to focus on the consequences or matter of the learning context rather than on the manner. Perhaps their greatest impact is in helping to fit the learning context to the individual child. Personalizing learning means greater freedom for the child to decide pace, style and substance of his learning. With performance objectives, a greater clarity and mutual understanding about the intent of the learning context between the teacher and the student is possible. In assessing student success performance objectives are also used, since judgment is based upon observable behavior. (JR)

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PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

NECESSARY OR SUPERFLUOUS

David P. Butts
Science Education Center
The University of Texas at Austin

Whether performance objectives are springboards or coffin lids will depend on the intent of the user. Just as beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, the necessity of performance objectives is a function of the people in the learning context. The learning context is being used to describe the coming together of many for the purpose of education. An assumption basic to this discussion is that we all are agreed that the outcomes of this "coming together" should be self-actualizing people--people who can make "wise choices and worthy decisions." For this potential of decision and choice making to mature, our students must have the freedom and opportunity to make decisions or choices within known parameters. In this way, feedback on the consequences of their choices makes it possible for the student's action to become intentional rather than trial and error accident.

The essential nature of parameters is that we must know the name of the game and the rules in order to be a fully functioning participant. As one participating person in the learning context, it is my responsibility as

SE 016 577

the teacher--guide, director, monitor--to make the name of the game and the rules or the parameters openly available to all the participants.

Performance objectives are an illustration of intended parameters. They are devices that can help clarify tasks and open channels of communication between key people in the learning context--the student and the teacher. Please note the conditional nature of this statement--<u>can help</u>. Performance objectives do not make good learning, they facilitate people.

In a learning context, students know because of

teachers instructional program,
school environment,
personal motivation, and
home background.

Without too much difficulty, we could make impressive lists of creative efforts to show that each of these factors is a necessary and sufficient cause for successfully functioning people who can make wise choices and worthy decisions. But, it is equally simple to make alternative lists of evaluation studies that negate each of these factors, with the exception of the teacher. If learning is an individual accomplishment, then the personal nature of this interaction between one who has a greater insight with one who is gaining insight cannot be over emphasized.

Performance objectives can facilitate this interaction if we define them as indicators or as assertions of what I as a teacher want my students to do because of the learning context. There is a very real distinction between open statements of intent which are useful for clarifying and communicating instructional intent. There are also closed descriptions that are hypothetical statements of what a learner should be able to do in a post instructional testing situation (1,10).

In the former (open objectives), the emphasis is on communicating the intended outcome in the language of the learner and a sharing of the relevance of this outcome in a way that will communicate to the learner.

In the latter (closed objectives), you will find careful attention to the precise description of tasks, conditions and criteria of the behavior which the learner is to demonstrate. While these are useful in constructing tests for assessment purposes, I see little value of closed objectives to facilitate communication between the teacher and student in the learning context.

Then what good are they?

"Goodness" is a value judgment. We may wish to use Charlie Brown's answer to this question:

> I think the best way to solve (it) is to avoid them. This is a distinct philosophy of mine. No (question) is so big or complicated that it cannot be run away from.

We can do a cop-out and merely ignore the question.

We can answer the question with a clear cut "None." This is a result of using the philosophy:

> know your stuff,
> know who you are going to stuff,
> and stuff them.

Or we can say "good" for these reasons:

Performance objectives facilitate

> directions for the learning context
> selecting learning opportunities
> fitting the learning context to the learner
> assessing success.

For any learning context, there are intended (implicitly or explicitly known) goals. Performance objectives make it possible for a teacher to define what

it is that schools need to do relative to the basic goal, that is to teach children to work and relate to each other (5). Performance objectives really push the teacher to be clearer and more specific in intentional outcomes which results in the teacher having a greater insight into the total tasks (1). Performance objectives also help a teacher to search out alternative sequence of goals and to coordinate many goals together. Because analysis of goals into smaller performance objectives requires careful study, they also reveal situations in which there are goals but no learning opportunities; or they help both the teacher and student to spot trash or trivia in the learning context (8).

Performance objectives provide a base of insight for the learning context which facilitates selecting many learning alternatives. The more I know about a subject, the greater the freedom I have to act. The converse is equally true. The less I know, the more I am restricted to two pages a day directed instruction. With performance objectives, a teacher has a basis for search for relevant activities that will facilitate individual children (6). A clear goal provides an insight into selecting and using a variety of materials because the performance objective helps us to focus on the consequences or the matter of the learning context rather than on the manner (6). Performance objectives also facilitate in finding where we have instruction with no goals (3).

Performance objectives have their greatest impact in helping us fit the learning context to the individual child. Personalizing learning means greater freedom for the child to decide pace, style and substance of his learning. With performance objectives, a greater clarity and mutual understanding about the intent of the learning context between the teacher and the

student is possible. Everyone knows what is expected (1,8) because mutual thinking and planning are essential in the communication of these intentions in student's language (8). Performance objectives are a way to focus on a variety of performance levels, e.g., knowledge, consequence, exploratory or knowledge, practice and application. The variety of expected performance levels known thus permits the teacher to focus on the variety of needs of learner's interests and abilities as important dimensions in organizing instruction to fit the child. Clear goals facilitate teachers becoming more expert in observing students and in recommending alternative activities within the learning context (1). Thus, performance objectives facilitate the shift from the "telling" information-giving-teacher who makes all the decisions and choices to one who organizes the context with many options and recommends the learner considering those choices that most likely best suit them. The performance objective makes it possible for a teacher to develop sensible objectives and then to help students to work toward these instructional outcomes (5).

Assessing success is not new. We always have and always will be involved in judging how well students are performing both in short term tasks and longer term goals. When we do this, we are using performance objectives, for we are basing our judgment on observable behavior. We may not feel comfortable in being specific about the shallow level of the objectives that our assessments indicate. Indeed, we may elect to debate performance objectives rather than face the shallowness of our judgment. Performance objectives permit us to gain more evidence that the learner has gained what we had hoped (3). They make more precise evaluation possible (9) in that they help us translate our intentions into measurable or observable evidence. Performance

objectives also help us to see where we have evaluation or tests with no instruction or goals and where we have goals or instruction with no evidence of success.

As used here, please note that performance objectives are part of a broader picture. Goals are the broad target and performance objectives are the target sheets. For the performance objective to be valued, it must exist within a larger conceptual context. Thus, the model of the learning context here is not a closed narrow system of

performance objectives
instruction
performance assessment,

but rather an open system of

job
task analysis
learning
performance assessment.

Performance objectives are not the first step on the ladder to perfection. They are inanimate until someone does something with them. But in our consideration, we must be careful to distinguish between our concern for the substance or outcomes or consequences or products of the learning context and the manner or processes of interaction within the context. It may be possible for us to be so uncomfortable with the process that we use a focus on the performance objective as a release or substitute because it is easier to reach for technology for solution than it is to face our real problem.

Summary

Performance objectives are springboards or coffin lids depending on the intent of the user. People are essential to the learning context and can

not be ignored. Schools are going to get better when teachers (with insight and confidence) get involved with one another and with children (process) and begin to face the problems of today's world as springboards for tomorrow (product). They are people problems and will be best approached through people focused schools and not technology. Performance objectives facilitate this goal of people who are capable of making wise choices and worthy decisions.

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